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## Observations on a Cannibalistic Gray Squirrel

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**ABSTRACT :** A short account of an incidence of cannibalism in a gray squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) population is given. A review of the literature revealed that the gray squirrel is primarily a herbivore. While cannibalism has been noted for other mammal groups, it has not been recorded among gray squirrels. A possible explanation is offered for the occurrence of this event.

On the morning of 30 August 1972, a gray squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) was observed chasing a smaller gray squirrel on the campus of Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. The larger squirrel caught its "prey" and with about ten bites to its throat killed it. The larger squirrel then began eating the flesh off its victim's head for fifteen minutes (9 :00 a.m. to 9 :15 a.m.) , after which time it picked up its victim and carried it off.

A search of the literature has failed to shed any light upon this incident. Gray squirrels are not noted as being carnivorous and occasionally noted as being omnivorous.

Results from a four year study on gray and fox squirrels (*Sciurus niger*) by Nixon *et al.* (1968) show the important foods of these rodents, in decreasing order of occurrence, were hickory nuts, beechnuts, acorns, fungi, black walnuts, plant leaves, yellow buckeye nuts, tuliptree samaras, flowering dogwood drupes, ironwood nuts, and hop hornbeam nuts. Animal foods, chiefly insects, occurred in 15.1 percent of the samples but made up less than two percent of the total volume.

Among other authors, acorns (Leopold and Hall, 1945 ; Schorger, 1947 ; Longley, 1963) , apples and pine cones (Laughlin, 1945) , immature ovaries off deciduous magnolia trees, and scale insects from the twigs of the same trees (Moore, 1949) , berries of the swamp tupelo and possibly berries of the blaspheme vine (Pournelle, 1950) , and *Cornus florida* fruits, *Pyralaria pubera* fruits, wild grapes, fruits of hickory, cucumber, mulberry and dogwood trees (Barbour, 1951) , have been found to satisfy the dietary needs of the gray squirrel.

Cannibalism is a common response to overcrowding in other mammal groups (Errington, 1943, 1963 ; Collias, 1944; Linsdale, 1946;

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Matthews, 1964; Cloudsley-Thompson, 1965 ; Burns, 1968 ; Stokes, 1969 ; Steiner, 1972) . Perhaps this attack was an indication of overcrowding in the gray squirrel population on the Northwestern University campus.

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